
If You Think Your Child Has a Vision Loss

Remember: Some of a child’s most important learning takes place in the first three years. A vision loss may affect your child’s development. If you are concerned about your child’s vision, it is important to speak with someone who can answer your questions and help you locate the specialized services your family needs.

Infants and toddlers use all their senses (vision, hearing, taste, smell, and touch) to explore their world and develop important learning skills. For most young children, playing with toys, learning to crawl and walk, and building relationships occur as a natural part of development.

For children who have a vision loss or impairment, early identification, treatment, and educational intervention is crucial because of their unique learning needs. If your child is blind or visually impaired, many aspects of his/her development (such as social and motor skills) may be affected.

Specialized services are available to help you learn how to teach your child to explore the environment, to create opportunities for learning, and to stimulate his/her development.

How Is Your Child Doing?

At these ages, he/she should:

- 0-6 months:**
- show interest in or stare at a light source
 - “fixate” (focus) on a brightly colored object held about three feet from his or her face
 - “track” (follow) a slowly moving, brightly colored object left-to-right
 - appear to react to a familiar face

- 6-12 months:**
- look at his/her own hands or at toys he/she is holding
 - follow the movement of an adult across the room
 - reach for objects out of reach
 - recognize and respond to familiar adults

- 12-18 months:**
- show interest in tiny objects
 - locate objects across the room and move to them
 - show interest in picture books
 - look at scribbles made with a crayon

- 18-36 months:**
- begin to complete simple shape formboards and puzzles
 - recognize and label familiar pictures
 - point to smaller features on pictures
 - have smoother eye-hand coordination (reach is accurate, is able to place objects in containers)

What Are Signs of Vision Problems?

- Behaviors** which may be signs of vision loss:
- Child presses his/her eyes with hands or toys
 - Child frequently rubs eyes
 - Child looks at things by tilting head in an unusual position
 - Child’s eyes move in an unusual way

High risk conditions associated with visual impairment:

- Albinism
- Amblyopia
- Anirida
- Cataracts
- Cerebral Palsy
- CHARGE
- Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI)
- Coloboma
- Cytomegalovirus (CMV)
- Down Syndrome
- Farsightedness
- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome
- Glaucoma
- Leber’s Amaurosis
- Marfan’s Syndrome
- Nearsightedness
- Nystagmous
- Optic Glioma
- Optic Nerve Hypoplasia
- Retinal Detachment
- Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP)
- Retinitis Pigmentosa
- Retinoblastoma
- Rett’s Syndrome
- Rubella
- Strabismus (eye turn)
- Toxoplasmosis
- Visual Field Defect

If a specialist, therapist or doctor has spoken with you about any of these conditions, or if you are concerned about your child’s visual skills, have your child’s vision checked by an ophthalmologist.

If You Have Concerns About Your Child’s Development, There Is Help Available

What is Early Intervention?

Early Intervention is a program sponsored by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) that helps parents of children birth to three to recognize and understand their child’s particular developmental needs, and teaches them ways to help their child grow. The Early Intervention team works with the family. Together they determine what type of help would be most beneficial, and put together an **Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)**. The IFSP specifies all the education, training and support services a family will receive to best help their child.

Specialized services for a child with vision loss can be part of your IFSP.

Who Are Specialty Providers?

Teachers of the Visually Impaired

provide instruction in the use of vision within such daily routines as play, feeding, communication, motor and learning tasks. They develop activities and adaptations to help your child use his/her vision as efficiently as possible. They can teach compensatory skills (such as the use of touch or hearing) and help you understand how the vision loss may affect your child's development. They may consult with other service providers such as doctors or therapists.

Orientation and Mobility Specialists

assess the effects of visual impairments on a child's motor and movement skills. They help children develop the skills they need to move independently and safely within their daily environment.

Ophthalmologists provide medical assessment, monitor eye health, measure visual acuity and prescribe corrective lenses as appropriate. They are medical doctors who can prescribe medication and/or perform surgical procedures.

Optometrists measure visual acuity and provide general eye exams for vision skills, low vision assessment and prescriptions for low vision aids.

Professionals with specialized training in visual impairments and infant/toddler development will work with your family and your Early Intervention Program and can provide:

- Low Vision Assessment
- Functional Vision Assessment
- Developmental Assessment
- Orientation and Mobility Assessment and Services
- Parent-to-parent support
- Direct Services
- Consultation and collaboration with other service providers
- Help in planning for the transition to preschool

Who Can Help and How ?

The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) can provide you with information about specialized programs and services, advocacy, and case management for children with visual impairments. Call the Children's Services Division at 800-848-8867 (voice) or 800-392-6556 (TTY).

Website: www.state.ma.us/mcb

Talk with your Early Intervention Program about accessing these services. If you are not already enrolled in an Early Intervention Program, call the *Central Directory for Early Intervention* at 800-905-8437 (voice) or 617-624-5992 (TTY) to find an Early Intervention Program in your community.

Website: www.mass.gov/dph/earlyintervention

What Are the Costs?

There is an Annual Service Fee for Early Intervention that is based on family size and income. Early Intervention services are supported by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, MassHealth, and health insurance companies.

Case management services through the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind are provided at no cost to families.

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